Trust fund to ‘fortify’ pubmedia

FCC’s Broadband Plan proposes major giveback of TV spectrum

By Dru Sefton

The FCC gives several nods to public broadcasting in its ambitious new National Broadband Plan, but makes clear that the system needs to transform itself into its next incarnation of “public media” to fulfill its potential for public service.

Says the plan may mean “raising the level of public media’s engagement with citizens, reducing or eliminating the barriers to public media’s expression as a public service, and seeking out new opportunities to reach the global public and to engage the government.”

The FCC is advising Congress to:

- Give broadcasters incentives to surrender some of their spectrum for auctions. Use proceeds from public broadcasting’s channels to endow a trust fund “to fortify public media across platforms”;
- Amend the federal Copyright Act to update pubcasting exemptions for online and broadcast distribution and archiving of content, giving “reasonable non-commercial downstream usage rights for this content to the American people”; and
- Increase federal funding to public media. “As broadband adoption and use continue to grow,” the plan states, “the need to provide significant amounts of new funding to public media will be essential.”

The National Broadband Plan is available online at broadband.gov/plan. It asserts that high-speed Internet connectivity for every American is now a necessity:

“Like electricity a century ago, broadband is a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life. It seeks to extend high-capacity connection, at a rate of 100 Megbits per second (mbps) to 100 million homes by 2020. Right now, the majority of the country’s Internet subscribers have service of 10 mbps. According to the FCC, 19 million Americans have broadband service at home, and 14 million Americans have access to broadband.

“Through advocacy, we will have bipartisan support, which will be crucial for Congress’s passage. This is a very important issue. There is a real sense of momentum behind this project.”

The FCC also provides a “roadmap” for how public media should use the funds:

- Use funds to “build and operate a broadband infrastructure that can support public media’s efforts to create and distribute digital content across all platforms.”

The FCC’s Broadband Plan was released on March 18, 2010.